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Checking on the CIA

A dispute in the U.S. Senate last session over the supervision of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) provoked a sharp clash and some bitter words between the chairmen of two important committees. It was settled last week so quietly that it was almost lost in the news of the opening of the new session.

Senator Richard Russell (Dem., Ga.) announced that he had invited three members of the Senate Foreign Relations committee to join the small group of Armed Services and Appropriations committee members, which he heads. This group is the sole congressional body with authority to review and pass judgment on operations and spending of the super-secret CIA.

Last year's dispute grew out of charges that the CIA had meddled in the affairs of some Latin American and Asian governments. There were also complaints that CIA had used foreign aid and educational programs as a cover for its spying operations.

Chairman J. William Fulbright and several other members of the Foreign Relations Committee felt that without more adequate supervision the CIA might cause serious damage to this country's relations with other governments.

The Fulbright committee introduced a resolution demanding the creation of a new committee with broader supervisory

powers. It proposed that three members of the Foreign Relations Committee be named to the new committee. These members, it was argued, would be better informed on diplomatic problems and would be more capable of preventing the CIA from making damaging mistakes in that area.

Russell accused Fulbright of trying "to muscle in" on his domain. He also implied that addition of three more members to his committee could result in dangerous leaks of information that might impair the country's intelligence sources.

After an extraordinary secret session of the Senate, the proposal was for all practical purposes buried in Senator Russell's committee. In the intervening months, apparently, Senator Russell either had some second thoughts on the matter or Senator Fulbright convinced him privately of the wisdom of the proposal.

At any rate, Fulbright, Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper of Iowa, the senior Republican member of the Foreign Relations committee, and Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (Dem., Mont.) have now been asked to join the supervisory committee.

All three are men whose knowledge of foreign affairs is extensive and whose reliability and judgment are unquestioned. The same solution could just as well have been reached a year ago.